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CHARLES EDWIN BENNETT, 1858 — 1921

By MARY B. McELWAIN
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Of the many students attracted to Cornell to study under Professor Bennett, there are not a few, I dare to believe, who like myself gratefully pay to him in their hearts Cicero's loyal tribute to Archias: *hunc video mihi principem et ad suscipiendam et ad ingediendam rationem horum studiorum exstitisse*; and echo Cicero's query: *hunc non diligam, non admirer?*

In his Presidential address, delivered before the American Philological Association at Toronto in December, 1908, Professor Bennett declared that "the two essentials of the teacher are a knowledge of his subject, and skill in adaptation to the problem momentarily in hand"; and in himself he exemplified the truth of this statement. He was pre-eminently a teacher, and his teaching was a manifestation of knowledge and of skill in adaptation. One went to his classes, confident of finding knowledge, and one came away, not only enriched by knowledge, but unfailingly stimulated to a higher and broader quest.

He was an exacting teacher, intolerant of shirking or of slipshod recitations, but he was most generous in his praise of good work, and quickly sympathetic with genuine effort, even when it was unsuccessful. For himself and his students he recognized one law, namely that it was incumbent upon each to do his own peculiar task as well as he knew how. The standard of perfection in every detail, to which he rigorously held himself, as well as his students was the secret of his own great success.

His power of maintaining a clear perspective, his alertness in appreciating difficulties from the point of view of his students, his patience in the exposition of a matter, his wise choice of illustrative material, his lucidity of presentation, his forceful and

cogent reasoning, his hospitable reception of challenging views, his genial sense of humor, his quickness in detecting fallacies,—all combined to make his classroom a constant delight, and a perennial source of inspiration. No problem of textual criticism, no study of the syntactical uses of the Latin Subjunctive could ever be regarded as “dry” when studied under the stimulus of his inspiring personality; while the exquisite beauty of his rendering of the classic authors, and the marvelous melody of his reading of Latin poetry were alike the despair of his students, and a potent argument in favor of his theory of Latin Prosody. To be in his class was to feel that he *knew*, and to strive more eagerly for knowledge.

But it was the privilege of many of his students to know him outside the classroom, and to touch more closely a personality of great charm and sweetness. The hospitality of his beautiful home, so graciously offered to us, showed other glimpses of his richly endowed nature. One could not walk with him among his flowers and not feel his passionate love for nature and all its aspects; the quiet beauty and harmony of his library bespoke the connoisseur in more than one line of art. And one constantly felt that his ripe scholarship, far from making him an ascetic recluse, had been mellowed and enriched under the pervasive influence of a widely diversified culture. We learned from him lessons for life no less than for scholastic research, to appraise rightly the things of the spirit as well as to value intellectual acumen, to admire truth and beauty in nature and art, and to scorn hypocrisy and ostentatious display.

Of one of his own teachers, Professor Bennett once wrote, “He was intellectually so honest and so keen, he possessed such power of analysis and illustration, he was so thorough in his training, he was so inspiring in his rendering of the Classics that I look back on those two years as the most valuable educationally of any I ever spent. Every day and hour is a precious memory.” So could I say of him. Swift, tireless, thorough, he accomplished an incredible amount which stands as a lasting memorial to him in the field of scholarship. But to us, his pupils,

he has left the obligation of proving ourselves worthy disciples of his teachings, of upholding his ideals, and of advancing the cause to which he gave his life. And with us will continue to abide the inspiration of his presence, and we shall still in memory

“see him as he moved,
How modest, kindly, all-accomplished, wise.”